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HISTORY OF S. ALLEN'S SONS

GREENFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS

1812 - 1912

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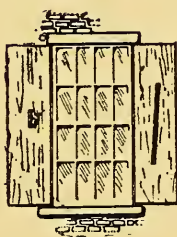
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HISTORY OF
S. ALLEN'S SONS

ONE HUNDRED YEARS



PUBLISHED AT ALLEN'S CORNER

UNIVERSITY OF
MASSACHUSETTS

AMHERST, MASS.

Foreword

THIS little book contains a plain narrative which would hardly have been worth the telling fifty years ago, but which has interest now because of the ephemeral character of nearly all local and family commercial enterprises in the present United States. Its brief history of one enduring family business may bring cheer to some of the observers of the times, who against their will have found themselves almost convinced that old-fashioned methods and principles were incompatible with the rivalries of modern trade.

History of S. Allen's Sons

GREENFIELD, the shire town of Franklin County, was originally the northern part of Deerfield and called "Green River." It was set off from the parent town and incorporated in 1753. In the beginning, like all the neighboring towns, it was an agricultural community. It developed rapidly into a trading center, so that in 1811, when the old Hampshire County, then comprising the present counties of Hampden, Hampshire and Franklin, was divided and the northern part set off under the name of Franklin County, by reason of its commercial importance and central situation, Greenfield was designated as the county seat. Here, in the same year as the division of the old County, came Sylvester Allen from Brookfield, Mass., then twenty-nine years of age—crippled from boyhood by the loss of a leg—to seek his fortune and to establish a business which was destined in his hands and those of his descendants to continue for a century. His modest advertisement, reproduced in these pages, appeared in the edition of the Greenfield Gazette on October 29, 1811. The shop in which he began "tayloring in all its branches," described as opposite Mr. Munn's tavern (the present Mansion House) was probably in the building formerly Ruel Willard's—

remembered as a wooden structure and standing upon the corner now known as "Allen's Corner"; so that the business then begun has been maintained ever since on the same site.

From "tayloring" Mr. Allen gradually expanded his adventure to the dimensions of the country store—all the stores in the town then being of that character, and with such success that in 1817 he was able to buy for himself and the wife he soon after married, a home lot on Federal Street, known to a later generation as the "Keuran place," situated where the Columbus Block now stands. Also in 1820 he purchased an interest in a store in Gill, and in 1822 was one of the incorporators of the Franklin Bank, the first bank in Greenfield, all of which is evidence of commercial prosperity.

In 1827 he bought of Charlotte Willard, the heir of Ruel, the corner lot where he had started in business fifteen years before. The lot was fifty feet east and west and twenty-five feet north and south. The deed also conveyed "the brick store now building." This store was the "first" or cornerstore, in the block of three stores built on the old Willard property and, with some additions, still stands on the corner. The first two stores are now occupied by S. Allen's Sons, the third by Fiske & Strecker's drug-store.

In the following year (1828) a partnership with Cephas Root was formed, the partners

TAYLORING BUSINESS.

S. Allen, From Brookfield,

INFORMS the gentlemen of Greenfield, and its vicinity, that he has taken the shop directly opposite Mr. Munn's tavern, where he intends carrying on the Tayloring business in all its branches. From experience, and close attention to his business, he flatters himself that he shall be able to please all who will favor him with their custom.

Said Allen's arrangements in Boston, are such as will enable him constantly to procure the newest fashions.

Work in his shop will be done in the best manner, and on as short notice as possible

Lady's Pelisses will be cut, or made, if requested.

A few Patterns of fashionable Broadcloths, Kerseymeres and Vestings, for sale as above.

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Greenfield, Oct. 29.

S. Allen's Advertisement in the Greenfield Gazette,
October 29, 1811

taking the name of Allen & Root. The business of the firm continued to be that of a general store, as may be learned from their first advertisement, here reproduced. In the advertised list of merchandise one discovers a predominance of hardware articles, a forecast of the business ultimately adopted, and, perhaps, notes the absence of that staple of commerce, New England rum, though it would be unsafe to conclude that the Allen & Root storehouse was without it.

At this time begins that interesting episode in Sylvester Allen's business career, his intimate and influential connection with Cheapside, the Port of Entry for Greenfield. This was the period of turnpikes and canals. The story of Cheapside is the story of a vanished era in transportation. Cheapside, then within the limits of Deerfield, situated on the bank of the Deerfield River a short distance above its junction with the Connecticut, was the head of river navigation. Here were located a number of stores and here came the boats loaded with English and West India goods, rum, flour, and cotton. Such was the importance of Cheapside that it was esteemed by many the proper location for the county seat and the hard fought contest with Greenfield for that distinction was not settled in the latter's favor until a year after the division of the old County. Allen & Root early acquired real estate on the river

New Goods.

Just received from NEW-YORK,
A general assortment of Staple,
Fancy and Domestic
GOODS.

—ALSO—

Hard,
Crockery, and } **Ware.**
Glass
Iron, Steel, and Nails,
8 by 10, 7 " 9 and 6 " 8 GLASS,
Cooking Furnaces.

Also—A complete assortment of

GROCERIES.

All of which are offered very low by

ALLEN & ROOT.

Greenfield, April 14, 1828.

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JUST received Smith Anvils and Vices, Mill
Saws Cross Cut, Pannel & back do. Iron Squares
Trying do. Box Rules, Braces of Bits from 18 to
42, Wr't Latches, Barrel Bolts, Closet and S. S.
Knob Locks, Trunk, Chest, Key, Till and Pad do.
Knives and Forks, Carvers, Table Steels, Bread
Knives, Shoe do. Awl Blades, Shoe Tacks, Broad
Butts, Common do Wood Screws, Brads and
Tacks, Commode Knobs, Bed Caps and Screws,
Cupboard Turns and Buttons, Escutcheons, Brass
Nails, Brass and Iron Candlesticks, Brass Hang,
Stand and Socket Lamps, Brass Andirons Brass
Head Shovels and Tonga, Tea Trays, Jap'd Tea
Kettles, Brass Kettles, patent Coffee Mills, Snell's
Augers, Plated and Japan'd Hames and Harness
Trimings.

—ALSO—

Old Madeira, Sicily Madeira, Lisbon and Mala-
ga **WINES,** Box and Sultana Raisins, Su-
perfine Genesee Flour; For Sale LOW by

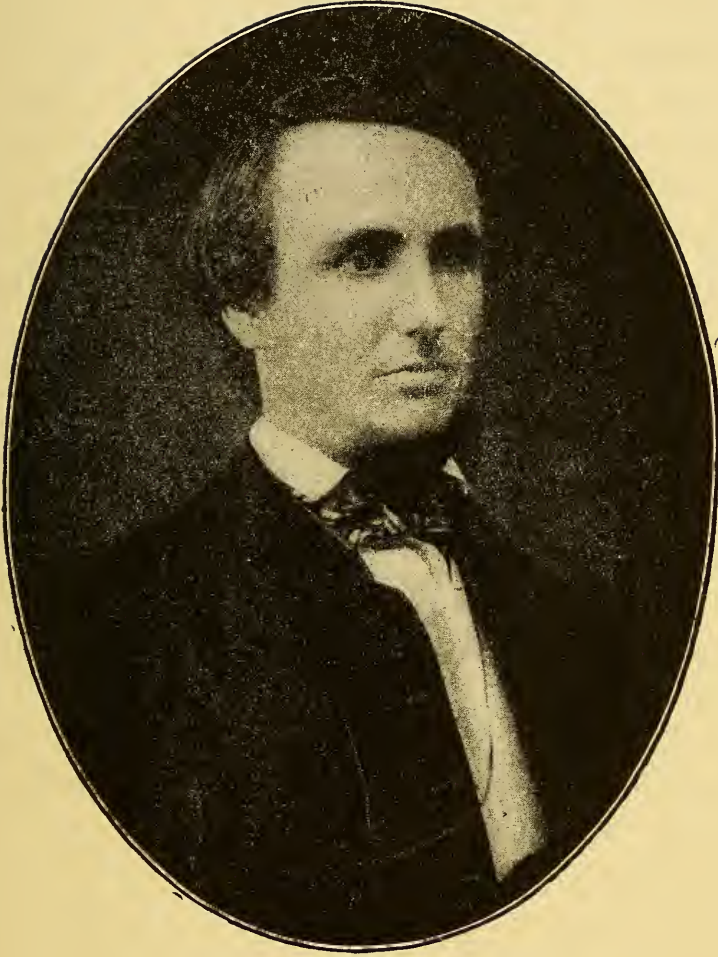
ALLEN & ROOT.

Greenfield, April 19, 1828.

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bank and about 1835 built a store building not far from the present highway bridge. They also bought an interest in the boat lines. The early boats were flat bottomed affairs of the scow type, equipped with sails which were effective when the wind was favorable, at other times recourse was had to poling—a method of propulsion known as the “white ash breeze,” and said to have been severe and exhausting labor. Upon the introduction of steam as a motive power, the river boats were rigged with a stern wheel. The Allen & Root steamer “Greenfield” was of this type. She was an old boat rebuilt, ninety feet long, eighteen feet wide, with two high pressure engines of twenty horse power each and patent boilers. Under the command of Capt. T. M. Dewey she was the freight transport of the firm until 1840, when she blew up.

The first railroad reached Greenfield in 1846. In that year the Connecticut River Railroad was extended from Northampton to Greenfield, to be followed in 1850 by the Vermont and Massachusetts from Fitchburg. With the advent of the railroads the glory of Cheapside departed. The Allen & Root storehouse was moved in 1846 to Greenfield, to a point near where the present freight station stands. In that year also came the dissolution of the firm. Mr. Root retired and was succeeded by Mr. Allen’s eldest son, William Henry, who had been in his father’s



WILLIAM HENRY ALLEN
Picture taken in 1846
There is no known picture of Sylvester Allen

employ for several years. The firm name became S. Allen & Son.

Two years later (1848) Sylvester Allen died. His son continued in the business and was joined by his next younger brother, Franklin R. The brothers styled their partnership S. Allen's Sons, the name that still lasts. Under their management the general lines of merchandise were eliminated and the store became a hardware store. The partnership thus established lasted until 1900. After 1860 when Wm. Henry Allen became Treasurer of the Franklin Savings Institution the active management of the business was assumed by Franklin R. Allen. In 1900 William H. sold his interest to his son Franklin, who had been in the employ of the firm for twenty-three years. The partnership of uncle and nephew lasted until the death of the former in 1906. The business since then has been owned exclusively by Franklin Allen, the younger, who carries it on under the old name.

Thus for one hundred years this business has remained in the hands of three generations of men. With the exception of Mr. Cephas Root's participation in it for eighteen years, it has been a family affair. Five individuals have been its proprietors. It has been conducted on safe, progressive principles. It may fairly be said that the names of its owners have always been synonyms for integrity.

Many well known names may be found in

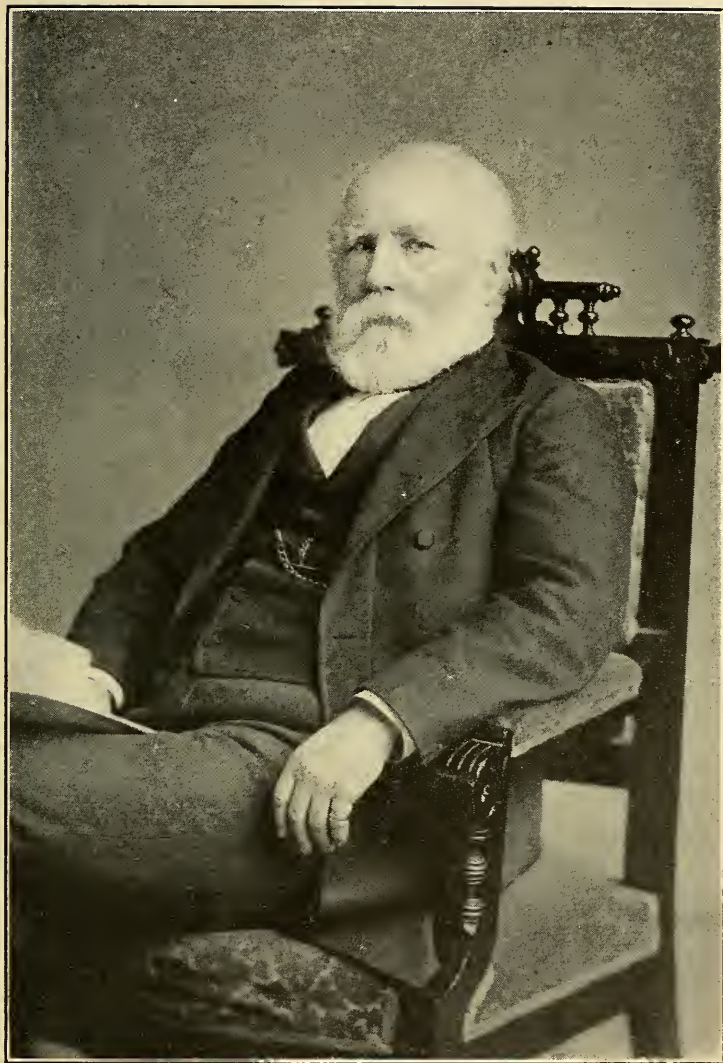


THE OLD STORE BUILDING

the list of employees of this house. Rufus Howland, for many years the well known druggist, was for eleven years the agent of Allen & Root at Cheapside. Barrett Ripley, a cousin of William H. and Franklin R. Allen, came to Greenfield to work for them at the time they started in business. He was influential in persuading them to conduct the store as a hardware store. He later lived for many years in Keene, N. H., a respected citizen, and died there. Two other clerks of S. Allen's Sons, during the period before the war were R. Webster Long of Shelburne and Charles Holloway of Conway. Both left to enlist in the 52d Regiment of Massachusetts Volunteers. Mr. Long was afterwards an express agent in Greenfield, and Mr. Holloway became a merchant in New Orleans.

Alfred E. Sanderson and Franklin A. Pond were for some time clerks in the store. The name of John H. Amidon is probably as well known to the people of Franklin County and vicinity as that of any business man in Greenfield. He has been the faithful and trusted employee of the house since 1864, a record of service which testifies alike to his regard for his employers and their appreciation of his worth.

Two views are here reproduced of the store building, one showing the building as it was originally, the other as it is now. Old patrons and inhabitants will remember the old store.



FRANKLIN RIPLEY ALLEN

The picture recalls the pitched roof, the passageway between the building and the Strecker block, next on the east and the entrance on Main Street through a door farther to the west than the present door.

There have been not a few changes in the interior. Formerly, immediately upon entering from Main Street, the visitor found himself directly under openings in the floors above, through which from a windlass on the top floor hung a chain and grapple by means of which the loaded nail kegs and other heavy merchandise were hoisted to the upper stories, a laborious exercise and likewise a perilous experience, as the cargo has been known to have escaped and come crashing to the first floor. However, there is no record of accident from this cause. The desk, partly enclosed by a wooden partition, stood directly west of the doorway, and the stairs up and down were next to the east wall. The labyrinthine arrangement of cases and counters, and the shovels and chains hanging above them in the east part of the store, will be remembered, likewise the corner room upstairs devoted to the wall paper department and to competitions in high jumping, the contestant armed with a piece of blue chalk seeking to make his mark as high up on the wall as possible, a room also much sought after as an observation point for circus parades and similar spectacles. The store building was then limited to the "first"



PRESENT STORE BUILDING

store, the same bought by Sylvester Allen in 1827. The acquisition of the store next south, formerly the Merriam book store is a matter of recent history.

The walls of the old building still stand, and the stout old wooden shutters are barred each night as in former time. More enduring than these outward and visible tokens of the past there remains that principle of honorable dealing with their fellow men by which the house has always stood fast.

“Neither citadel nor ship is of any worth without the men dwelling in them.”

Though the goods for sale and the system of sale change with the changing years, the spirit of business honor which animated Sylvester Allen and his sons abides in the place where they toiled. Their children “have not forsaken, neither have they cast off, their inheritance.”



FRANKLIN ALLEN

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